

10. LARGE GREY BABBLER ATTACKING METAL HUB-CAP OF WHEEL OF CAR

On 2nd January, 1950, I was sitting in the garden at Delhi, the car standing in front of the porch not many yards away, when I heard a sound as of something striking metal. I saw that a Large Grey Babbler (*Argya malcolmi*) was jumping from the ground and vigorously tapping the metal hub-cap of the wheel of the car. A servant came to see what was causing the noise, and thereupon the bird went round to the wheel on the other side, but again it was driven away. Soon after the car was driven away for half an hour, but then was left in the same position.

Presently the babbler reappeared, and as no servant was within hearing, for some two minutes the bird constantly leapt up, and made a resounding peck at the hub-cap each time.

When it finally grew tired of this extraordinary action, I went to the car, and by lying on the ground tried to get my eye into the position of the babbler's eye. It was true that I could see myself reflected in the cap, but, owing to its convex shape, my image was greatly reduced in size. This makes the behaviour of the bird all the more puzzling.

In England there have been records of Grey Wagtails (*Motacilla cinerea*) constantly tapping at windows, and occasionally I think other species have been noted. It is usually supposed, I believe, that the bird sees its own image reflected in the window, and tries to attack it. But why should a bird try to attack its own image when that image looks very small and therefore presumably a long way off? Moreover, the Large Grey Babbler is notoriously a sociable bird, and in this very case, others of the 'sisters' were hopping about quite near, although no other indulged in this curious action while I was watching. I am almost inclined to think that the noise had more significance for the bird than the image seen in the hub-cap. Can any of your readers provide any parallel experience?

24, RAJPUR ROAD,
DELHI,
1st June, 1950.

H. G. ALEXANDER

11. COMMON MYNAH (*ACRIDOTHERES TRISTIS*) NESTING IN THE NEST OF PIED MYNAH (*STURNOPASTOR CONTRA*)

A pair of Pied Mynahs had built their nest in the lower branches of a sal (*Shorea robusta*) at a height of about 25 feet from the ground, in my compound here in Giridih. When the nest was complete the rightful owners were set upon and driven away by a pair of Common Mynahs, who have now established themselves in the nest.

Referring to Stuart Baker, Fauna, Birds, Vol. III (2nd ed.) page 54—I see that he has seen a few nests of the Common Mynah (*A. t. tristis*) built in trees and that the nests were 'huge domed affairs like those of the Pied Mynah.'

Could it be possible that the nests he saw were not actually *built* by the Common Mynah but were stolen property as is this nest in my compound?

c/o D. E. ROSAIR, ESQ.,
P.O. GIRIDIH,
DIST. HAZARIBAGH, BIHAR.
23rd June, 1950.

K. M. KIRKPATRICK

[In Vol. II, p. 526 of his 'Nidification of Birds of the Indian Empire' Stuart Baker writes of the Common Myna :

"When they make their nests on branches of trees they are rather better built. All those I have seen myself were domed, great balls of grass, leaves and miscellaneous scraps, with dense linings of feathers. Other writers, however, speak of cup-shaped nests. Tickell and Hume both saw such nests; Adam 'saw a pair of this species building a large cup-shaped nest in a babool-tree'; while Marshall (G.F.L.) says that this myna 'frequently lays in cup-shaped nests of sticks placed in trees, like small crows' nests'."—EDS.]

12. PECULIAR ROOSTING SITE OF THE HOUSE SWIFT (*MICROPUS AFFINIS*)

During a recent rainy spell here my servant, an aboriginal of no mean observational powers and a keen bird-watcher to boot, informed me that he had seen quite a few House Swifts, which are very common here, flying into the nests of the Baya Weaver (*Ploceus philippinus*)—a colony of which were then breeding in a Palmyra (*Borassus flabelliformis*) in a garden nearby. As I had previously noted that this particular palmyra was also the breeding haunt of the Palm Swift (*Cypsiurus parvus*) I thought he may have made a mistake and accordingly proceeded to investigate.

However, I am glad to say that his observations were quite correct and that at least ten or twelve House Swifts were utilising old but sound nests of *P. philippinus* as dormitories during the rainy spell but deserted them as soon as the weather returned to normal. The weaver birds were breeding at the same time in the same tree but did not apparently mind this 'squatting' in their former homes.

The House Swifts, so amazingly agile on the wing, could not compete with the Bayas in ascending the funnel of the nests in one aerial zoom but contented themselves with alighting on the inside of the funnel about two or three inches up and then very laboriously crept up the rest of the way. That they were not breeding in the Bayas' nests is apparent from the way they so readily deserted them in fine weather and

also by virtue of the fact that at least three to four birds were occupying a single nest.

Total nests on the tree were as follows:

1.	<i>Ploceus philippinus</i> (in active use and green)	...	...	14
2.	" " (old but sound and used at random by <i>Micropus affinis</i> as dormitories)	...	...	5
3.	<i>Ploceus philippinus</i> 'Cocknests'	...	...	6
4.	<i>Cypsiurus parvus</i>	...	...	4
5.	<i>Acridotheres tristis</i>	...	in leaf base	1

It may also be interesting to note that the Baya in Giridih frequently hangs its nests in small colonies on the imported Eucalyptus, which grows well in this climate and the fruit of which is a great attraction to swarms of flying foxes in season.

GIRIDIH,
28th September, 1950.

KENNETH M. KIRKPATRICK

13. TAMENESS OF WILD GREY LAG GEESE TAKEN AS ADULTS

When we were camping at Katoria in March, 1949, (South Bhagalpur District), the Excise Sub-inspector came to meet us followed by a pair of Grey Lag Geese (*Anser anser*). As these were obviously wild birds and not the common village geese, my interest was aroused. On enquiry it came out that both the birds had been shot the preceding February at a tank situated about $1\frac{1}{2}$ miles from the Dak Bungalow in the middle of some scrub forest. It is a biggish tank, the largest stretch of water for some distance, and with a good deal of cultivation near about.

The female was shot on 6-2-'49, at about 5 p.m., in the right wing which was badly damaged. The local doctor successfully amputated that wing and the goose lived. It was a remarkable case of surgery meant for human beings applied to a bird.

The male was shot on 19-2-'49, in the wing at about 5 p.m., and recovered after treatment by the same doctor.

Both are perfectly tame now. The female is incapable of flight, but the male occasionally takes to the air, always returning, however, to the house of its owner. They are fed on paddy and boiled rice.

I wonder if cases have occurred of wild geese having been shot and subsequently domesticated.

c/o SAMI AHMED ESQ.,
FOREST OFFICE,
DALTONGANJ,
3rd April, 1950.

JAMAL ARA

14. STRAY BIRD NOTES FROM MALABAR

1. THE STORK-BILLED KINGFISHER. This bird though reputed shy, is a conspicuous resident in many villages in Palghat taluk. Even in the heart of the town its calls are often heard during the rainy season. In the drier months of the year it goes about singly and is somewhat retiring by disposition, but when the rains break, it is found in pairs and flies about boldly filling the air with its loud raucous calls.

In the months of May, June, July and August, the Storkbilled Kingfisher indulges in a strange sort of game. Both birds of a pair sit on some low perch, a short distance away from a mud or brick wall that has neither been plastered nor whitewashed, and uttering the harshest of their calls, dart with breath-taking speed at the small holes or cracks in the wall as if to transfix the wall with their bills. Some times they hit it with such force that an onlooker would expect their bills to break. Yet nothing happens, the birds return to the perch, flick their tails and bob up and down (as the Common Kingfisher does after it has swallowed a fish) and once again without waiting even to wipe off the mud sticking to their bills, fling themselves at the wall, to the accompaniment of fiendish croaks.

One of the walls, on which a pair used to concentrate, had a long narrow crack running down it. In five different places along this the Kingfishers had made small cavities 3 to 4 inches across and 4 or 5 inches deep by flying repeatedly to the same points. None of the holes was excavated further and, after a time, the birds lost all interest in them.

The zeal with which the birds play this 'game' decreases as the rainy season advances; in May and June the kingfishers spend five to six hours at it, whereas, in late August, they fly only once or twice a day at the walls. By the end of July the birds begin to go about singly. It is clear that they take the greatest interest in the walls when they are together, and become indifferent when, or soon after, the pairs break up.

The birds do not seem to have any obvious motive for doing this. Though geckos and some insects like the mole-cricket often hide in the crevices, the kingfishers have never been found catching and eating any.

The White-breasted Kingfisher, while making a tunnel, often does the same sort of thing in a mud bank. But the Storkbill cannot nest in hard, three-foot thick brick walls. As the birds make these small holes year after year, unless we assume that they never learn from experience, we cannot say that they are attempting to nest in the walls.

Is this then a sort of courtship? Or is it just a game the birds play with the sole purpose of letting off steam during the early part of the breeding season? (Though I have yet to find a nest of the Storkbill, I have little doubt that their breeding season here is in the monsoon months.) The Common Kingfisher's courtship consists of, or at least begins with, a mad chase during which the pursuing partner utters high-pitched, piercing whistles. In May and June, the Storkbilled Kingfisher also frequently chases its mate, less speedily than its smaller cousin, but with much more noise. And as it is at this period that the

birds spend most time near the walls, I suspect that this wall-boring may be a part of the courtship activities.

2. THE PARIAH KITE—Local Migration? From the village of Kavasseri, 12 to 13 miles south-west of Palghat, Pariah Kites totally disappear during the monsoon months, though in Palghat town itself they may be seen even at the peak of the monsoon.

On 29th May, 1950, some days after the rains had set in, I was surprised to find some twelve Pariah Kites sailing and soaring like vultures from south to north (or north-east), late in the evening, along a range of hillocks. The next evening not even a single Pariah Kite was seen in the place though I kept close watch. On the 31st, at about 8.30 a.m., I was standing on top of a hillock, one of a line extending roughly east to west for some miles, stretching upto the Palghat Gap on its southern side. There was a strong wind blowing from west to east and a light shower of rain also. My attention was caught by seven Pariah Kites that seemed to be sailing single file against the wind, towards a point in the west. These were very soon followed by a surprising number of Pariah Kites, flying along the same route, over some valleys and low hillocks which lay in a line, east to west. In twenty minutes more than two hundred birds flew past. Some alighted on a low gravel covered hillock, the only low hill which was not all rock. There were many small boulders on this hillock. On these many of the birds sat, some alighted on the bare ground and others waddled about clumsily holding their wings horizontally extended. Often two or three quarrelled for the same stone to perch upon.

Apparently they alighted on the hillock for a brief rest. As some of these took off and continued their journey, others, coming from the east, took their places. Almost all the birds sailed down on steady wings and only two or three strayed, soaring about over some spot on the way. The birds never uttered any calls. By about 9.30 a.m. all the birds had disappeared, though a few still dribbled in in ones and twos. Two or three left the main line of flight and were seen at 10 a.m. wheeling about over a village half a mile to the north. On June 2nd I went at 8.30 a.m. to the same hillock, but not a single Pariah Kite was seen though I remained till 10 a.m. Thirteen or fourteen Brahminy Kites flew west along the same route which the Pariah Kites had taken. The village of Kavasseri lies in a sort of cup within the hills: on the eastern side we have the Palghat Gap, and on the western side there is a small break, a valley, east of Trichur. The Kites seemed to be headed straight towards this. I wonder whether this was a local migration. Normally Pariah Kites are never seen in such large numbers in the place at any time of the year.

3. THE LITTLE MINIVET. THREE ADULTS WORKING AT THE SAME NEST. On the 9th of April, 1950, I came across a nest of the Little Minivet in a teak jungle on the lower slope of a hillock. While watching the birds at work, I was surprised to find *three* birds sharing the labour! One was a male and the other two, apparently, were females. All three came repeatedly to the nest and evinced considerable interest in its progress. One after the other they came to the

nest, their wings feverishly quivering, added some material to the nest, and waited until the others had also done the same. Of the two which were in female plumage, one was definitely more active, came to the nest more often and more regularly and seemed to get more attention from the male. The less active female, however, brought lichen or cobweb now and then and worked it in as efficiently as the other two. About a month later¹ when the two chicks were being fed, all three adult birds were in attendance and all fed the chicks! How did three birds come to share a nest? Was the third another female—one that had not begun to lay, or having laid, had lost its eggs at a late stage,—or a chick of a previous brood? Has this kind of thing been observed in the minivets or any other birds before?

GOVT. VICTORIA COLLEGE,
PALGHAT, S. MALABAR,
6th September, 1950.

K. K. NEELAKANTAN,
B.A. (Hons.)

15. STRAY BIRD NOTES FROM TIBET

In a letter dated 12 April 1950 from Lhasa, Mr. H. R. Richardson of the Indian Political Mission gives some interesting ornithological information.

'The spring always brings a pair of Goshawks (*Astur gentilis*). There are also the Hobby (*Falco subbuteo*), Sparrow-Hawk (*Accipiter nisus*), Cherrug and Laggar Falcons (*F. cherrug* and *F. jugger*) and the Peregrine (*F. peregrinus*), although not actually at Lhasa.

I have seen Avocets (*Recurvirostra avocetta*) in large numbers, also Black-tailed Godwit (*Limosa limosa*) and a Stilt (*Himantopus himantopus*) on the Hram Tsho.

This year I saw a Kingfisher (*Alcedo atthis*) at about 13,600 feet in November sitting quite happily on a block of ice above Samada. Another point, on which Ludlow² had doubts is the occurrence of the White-capped Redstart (*Chaimarrhornis leucocephalus*) beyond the Tang La. It is common round Lhasa in the summer and I have seen it in Yarlung and also some 60 miles north of Lhasa. The Blue-fronted Redstart (*Phoenicurus frontalis*) also occurs round Lhasa.

Once and once only, I have seen a Rosy Pastor (*Pastor roseus*) at Lhasa; it must have been a wanderer³.

114, APOLLO STREET,
FORT, BOMBAY.
20th May, 1950.

EDITORS

¹ During this interval I was away from the village and could not continue my observations.

² Birds of the Gyantse Neighbourhood. *Ibis* (1928:60).

16. SCENT OF GAME-BIRDS

Do game-birds lose their scent in the breeding season, as a provision of nature, or develop an obnoxious counter scent?

A young friend staying with me, committed the unforgivable sin of shooting a stone-curlew (*Burhinus oedicnemus*), better known as the goggle-eyed plover, in June, when both my seasoned and trained labrador, and a puppy under training 9 months old, refused to pick it up.

The dog is four years old and has retrieved snipe and woodcock and all the common game-birds met with in a season's shooting; the puppy retrieved snipe and teal at five months, but even when I persuaded her to carry the bird, she held it gently by the neck and her expression was definitely one of disapproval.

I have read of these birds being excellent for the table, but have never myself shot or eaten them before, and when I tried to eat this bird it tasted like a pigeon boiled in quinine! To satisfy my curiosity I had two others shot in the same locality (there are about thirty birds collected and some have already flown their young, while others have eggs on which they are sitting). The birds shot were males, and all tasted rank.

Will the pundits give an explanation?

KOOREA,

P. O. BETTIAH,

CHAMPARAN, BIHAR,

A. ST. J. MACDONALD

6th July, 1950.

[Dr. Hugh B. Cott of the Cambridge University Zoological Museum—who has done (and is doing) some excellent pioneering investigations on the palatability of birds and their eggs in relation to conspicuous and cryptic colouration—in a recent letter quotes a number of well-authenticated examples confirming that ground nesting birds lose their scent in the breeding season as a protection against predators that 'follow their nose'.

What interests Dr. Cott particularly in our correspondent's note, however, is the suggestion, new to him, that breeding ground-birds may not merely lose their scent in a passive way, but may on the other hand actually develop an obnoxious scent (and taste) that might act as a deterrent to enemies. This is what would appear to have happened in the case of Mr. Macdonald's stone-curlews, a species which consensus of opinion of most sportsmen in India and elsewhere (and also our own experience) pronounces to be excellent eating in the non-breeding season—at least in winter.

The suggestion obviously offers a wide scope for serious experimental and observational work in which sportsmen and field naturalists can make useful contributions to knowledge. Dr. Cott suggests making comparisons as regards flavour in some Indian birds, both in and out of the breeding season, selecting for the experiments ground-nesting and cryptic species, such as, for example, Grey Partridge, Common Sandgrouse, Courser, larks, and pipits. The flesh could be tasted in different seasons and ranked by a system of

percentage deviation from a standard, by a panel of selected human tasters. Or it could be offered to a discriminating dog or cat together with some standard food to afford a means of comparison. Both these methods are successfully employed by Dr. Cott for his own investigations, and it is amazing how closely the results agree with and complement each other.—EDS.]

17. FIELD IDENTIFICATION OF BIRDS: NOTES ON THE HOODWINK (*DISSIMULATRIX SPURIA*)

After conversations with many bird-lovers, glances at my own ornithological notebooks and perusal of articles in ornithological journals, I am impressed by the number of records of birds partially seen or indeterminately heard: and it seems evident that the majority of these records are attributable to a single species—the Hoodwink—which I propose to name *Dissimulatrix spuria*.

The existence of this species has already been recognised by several authors, amongst them James Thurber, who has presented a somewhat imaginative picture of the bird perched upon a spray of Ragamuffin. Gaetke, on Heligoland, shot several specimens of the Hoodwink, but they invariably fell over steep cliffs into the sea and 'were not secured'. Observers in tropical forests are familiar with the Hoodwink, which invariably keeps to the densest vegetation (where it is extremely vociferous), and refuses to be lured into the open by the observer's imitation of a Black Mamba. The Hoodwink has several times been photographed: it is the brown blur that passes rapidly from right to left in all ornithological films. In many records of bird song, also, the Hoodwink can be heard in the background, imitating the barking of dogs, the hooting of automobiles, the pleasant drone of the farm tractor, etc. The Hoodwink was known to the Ancients: unsatisfactory views of the Hoodwink, before the invention of the telescope, led to unreliable early records of the Phoenix, Roc, Harpy, Hippogriff, Barnacle Goose, etc. Nor has the Hoodwink been neglected in literature: it is clear to the experienced observer that both Keats and Shelley wrote Odes to the Hoodwink. The bird has also a definite place in British folklore; in parts of East Anglia it is, to this day, considered lucky to drink a gallon of beer both before and after first hearing the Hoodwink in spring.

A peculiarity of the Hoodwink is that it is more frequently observed by beginners in ornithology than by more practised observers. Yet records by practised observers exist. In a recent number of the *Ibis* a well-known ornithologist, in order to demonstrate the fatuity of 'sight records,' related how he had seen a Common Buzzard identified by a German zoologist as a White-tailed Eagle. Now, according to the evidence to hand, there is no presumption that it was a buzzard rather than an eagle. Surely a third hypothesis is possible—that it was a Hoodwink. And readers of ornithological literature in the 1930s will remember the case of the Hoodwink on one of the London reservoirs which imitated now the Great Northern Diver now the Black-throated.

Only one record of a ringed Hoodwink exists: on being ringed, at Tooting Bec, it was entered in the schedule by the Misses Motmot and Tody as 'Little Tom Tit' and was subsequently recorded as 'Blue Tit, imm.' On being retrapped, it was thought by Miss Eleanor Falcon (of Woking), after reference to the *Handbook*, to be a Lanceolated Warbler. It was later found dead, in an advanced state of decomposition, and identified by Mrs. Snow-Bunting, also of Tooting, as her Budgerigar *Melopsittacus undulatus*, Percy.

Below is listed what information has so far been obtained relating to the bird:—

The Hoodwink—*Dissimulatrix spuria* spec. nov. (Restricted typical locality, 'Mon Repos,' Waterloo Boulevard, Bournemouth.)

Habitat.—Catholic, with marked preference for suburban bird-tables. Frequently haunts cliffs, tropical forests, beds of ragamuffin (Thurber) and other places where quick dash to cover is possible. In Southern France in winter often found in loose association with other Hoodwinks.

Field Characters and General Habits.—Generally recognisable by *blurred appearance* and extremely rapid flight away from observer. Polymorphous and strongly imitative: when imitating another species closely similar to an allied species, will tend to imitate the rarer, i.e. Greenish rather than Willow Warbler, Collared rather than Pied Flycatcher, Blue-spotted Whitethroat rather than White-spotted Blue-throat, etc. *Usually solitary*: but Miss Florence Pratincole records *a flock of Hoodwinks*, seen many years ago near childhood home at Budleigh Salterton: Col. Trumpeter-Swan, uncle of observer, who had lived many years in India, insisted categorically that they were Hoodwinks. Most information on field characters obtained from bird-tables by Committee of Suburban Bird-lovers: 'a brownish silent bird, which jumped up and down all the time' (Miss Ruby Godwit, Murrayfield). 'I could not see whether it was as big as a thrush, but it seemed to fancy cold porridge' (Miss Betsy Phalarope, Auchen-shuggle). 'About the size of a piece of wood' (Mrs. Carolina Craik, Epping). P. B. Shelley's observation that Hoodwink resembles 'poet hidden in the light of thought' not confirmed by later observers. Ordinary gait a rapid scuffle: in breeding season 'a stealthy walk' (Turnstone, *Fun in Birdland*). On water dives readily: average of 373 dives approx. 30 minutes—in each case the observer went home to tea before the Hoodwink had risen to the surface. Apparently roosts among rows of bottles *in bitternlike posture*.

Voice.—Usual call a shrill, slightly sibilant, 'pee-pee-wee,' perhaps the same as that rendered by Slobeend as 'wee-pee-pee.' Also utters 'a long-drawn wheezing sigh' (Wigeon *in litt.*), perhaps identical with the 'protracted sighing wheeze' described by R. C. Pochard. Call resembling the creaking of an unoiled hinge, formerly supposed to be uttered by Hoodwinks, now shown to be made by the creaking of an unoiled hinge. Also highly imitative, e.g. of Redwing, a sound commonly produced on October evenings, when ornithologists are listening for Redwings. In February and early March utters a loud, ringing 'cuckoo' (Daily Press, *passim*). *Song Period*.—Prolonged

research involving rising at dawn, stop-watches and B.Sc. degrees have conclusively shown that the Hoodwink does not sing all the day long: sometimes it sings, sometimes it is silent. It has been suggested that Scottish Hoodwinks, on physiological grounds, should be separated as *D. s. annielaurieae* on account of prolonged singing on 31 December—described by McSporrán as 'supersong.' The Scottish form does not, apparently, sing on Sundays (*v* histogram in possession of Ecclefechan Burns Club).

Display and Posturing.—In breeding season male flies round in ever-decreasing circles, evoking no response whatsoever from female. Also indulges in 'false preening,' 'false sleeping,' 'false waking,'¹ 'false eating,' 'false drinking,' 'false singing' and 'false dancing'; and, in the case of the female, a rapid movement of the toes denominated by Steinwaelzer 'false knitting' (*pseudotricotage*). 'Distraction display' takes the form of 'rodent-running'—only backwards: this causes female observers to run away, screaming (see Y. B. Sapsucker, The Distraction Display of the Female Ornithoscooper).

Breeding.—Details little known, but undoubtedly sometimes reproduces by *binary fission*; many reliable ornithologists, watching the Hoodwink, have seen it split into two halves and fly away in opposite directions. *Nest.*—Uses old mares' nests; eggs also laid at random, e.g. in egg-cups. Apparently responsible for the construction of *old nests*, involving young oologists in climbing *very high trees* or *very steep cliffs*: these nests often found to contain old baked-bean tins. *Eggs.*—Served in British hotels—recognisable by glycerine-like consistency and frequent presence of embryo. Also possibly in Egypt, where eggs described as tasting 'as if laid by mummy' (Lord Edward Cecil). *Clutch-size.*—Unknown, but, on approach of ornithologist, Hoodwink usually lays more eggs, or removes those already laid.

Food.—Analysis of two stomachs reveals 80 per cent vegetable food (pipe-cleaners and breakfast cereals²), but has been seen to pursue and kill a male Nitwit. Also recorded, shoots and seeds of *Lex non-scripta*, *Copia verborum*, *Lapsus calami* and *Insania amabilis*. McSporrán considers that haggises are the pellets of the Hoodwink.

Distribution.—British Isles.—Sporadic: number of records depends more on character of observer than on frequency of species. Miss Fanny Pine-Grosbeak (Chorlton-cum-Hardy) has more than 322 records. Miss Euphemia Wryneck accurately refers to the status of the Hoodwink in Birmingham as 'pretty casual.' Interesting population studies of the Hoodwink have been made, using 'transects' taken from railway trains and nocturnal counts from lighthouses (Goosander and Smew. *Zeitschrift für mitttelrntlandische Ornithologie*, Vol. CCLI).

Migrations.—Apparently aimless movements. British Hoodwinks move in a rough circle involving Fair Isle, the Isle of May, Holy Island, Spurn Point, Cley-next-the-Sea (Norfolk), the Norfolk Broads, Romney

¹ A form of distraction display also recorded among university students.

² McSporrán considers breakfast cereals to be *mineral*.

Marsh, the London Reservoirs, the Severn Estuary, Skokholm and the breeding quarters of the Kite (a Welsh village called Hush)—with occasional trips to the Camargue.

Distribution abroad.—Almost ubiquitous; coinciding remarkably with the distribution of the Fervent Ornithoscopter *Ornithoscopta pervovens*, on which it is partially parasitic.

Description.—Little known, although in the opinion of Elliott (*in oratione recta*) is not infrequent in museum collections, many skins becoming 'hoodwinked.' Brown speculum characteristic of third year female, though this is often obscured. General plumage, buffish fawn shading to fawnish buff. *Soft parts* (i.e. hard parts): fawnish horn shading to hornish fawn.

Characters and allied forms.—Immediately recognizable by the fact that the true basipterygoid processes are absent, but more anteriorly the basisphenoid rostrum bears a pair of facets projecting only slightly beyond its general surface, the so-called secondary basipterygoid processes, with which the anterior ends of the pterygoids articulate. Represented in Arctic snowstorms by *D.s. spurissima* (the so-called Pomatorhine Hoodwink), characterised by its more woolly appearance. *D.s. sarah-janae* (O.Hebrides), *D.s. mrs-jonesae* (Mull) and *D.s. gretae-garbo* (Clerkenwell) are doubtfully separable¹. Bones of a closely related genus, *Palaeodissimulatrix*, have been found in kitchen middens.

15, OX LANE,
HARPENDEN, HERTS,
ENGLAND.

M. F. A. MEIKLEJOHN

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18. THE RECORD RUSSELL'S VIPER [*VIPERA RUSSELLI* (SHAW)]

Up to the present date the largest recorded Russell's Viper measured 5 ft. 6 inches. That specimen was killed at Cuddalore, North Arcot, in 1894—(*Journal*, Vol. VIII No. 4. p. 565.) and was mentioned by Wall at page 3 of Vol. XVIII No. 2 as the largest record known to him.

¹ This has not prevented the author of these names, in a laudable desire to immortalize various respectable females, from attempting to separate them until they have become extinct. This process has been termed 'going into a cline.'